

Report title	Annual Fostering Report 2018 - 2019	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services	
Originating service	Children's Services	
Accountable employee	Lisa Whelan Tel Email	Service Manager – Children and Young people in Care 01902 555097 Lisa.whelan@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to has been considered by	Children's Leadership Team	11 July 2019

Recommendation for decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Approve the attached Annual Fostering Report 2018-2019

1.0 Purpose

1.1 To Inform of the developments, progress and future objectives of the Fostering Service.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Fostering Service is located within the People Directorate of the City of Wolverhampton Council. The Fostering Service recruits, supports and develops Foster Carers to care for and support vulnerable children placed in their care. These placements include children placed with Friends and/or Family (Connected Persons Carers) by the Local Authority. The Fostering Service also assesses and monitors Private Fostering arrangements.

2.2 The activity of the service works in conjunction with the following legislation:

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and case Review 2010 and Update 2013

2.3 The Fostering Service seeks to provide a comprehensive and excellent quality foster care to all children looked after by the City of Wolverhampton. Foster carers provide children in care a positive experience of family life within an environment that promotes their physical, emotional and health needs.

2.4 Foster carers work in partnership with Health, Education and other allied professionals to ensure best outcomes for children and young people in foster placements. Working in partnership enables Foster Carers to provide a warm, safe and caring family environment ensuring that the children's emotional health and development is promoted and there is access to available opportunities to promote children's attendance and their academic achievements thus maximising all opportunities for children to achieve their full potential.

2.5 In March 2017 iMPower were commissioned by City of Wolverhampton Council to support the development of the in-house fostering service. The goal being to enable greater in-house placement sufficiency, and better use of resources. The project concluded in May 2017 with a recommendation that the low levels of enquiry generation was the primary cause of the limited in-house foster carers growth. The Family Values was developed and workstreams set up. A steering group meets monthly to oversee the progress of the project and tracks completed and outstanding tasks for further focus.

3.0. Summary

- 3.1 The Fostering Service was restructured in November 2018 as part of a wider Children's Service's restructure and there are now two teams within the service focussed on Recruitment and Assessment and Support. The Fostering Service continues to benefit from experienced managers and the compliment of social workers remains stable with no agency workers currently employed. Both teams have made significant progress during the year with many development and improvements made across the service as described and outlined above. The latter part of the year saw a new project "Foster Families United" introduced and alongside promotion for this a pilot project based on the model has had a very positive and encouraging start. As always, the fostering service is engaged in continuing to strive for further improvements.
- 3.2 The Family Values Fostering review project which concluded in May 2017 stated that the city of Wolverhampton provides placements that are better value for money and can offer more positive outcomes for children and young people. Three key areas of growth to increase and improve capacity were identified:
- Increasing enquiry generation.
 - Improving enquiry handling.
 - Developing the support and supervision offer.
- 3.3 Whilst the Family Values project has provided structure and parameters with clear objectives, participation in the workstreams and steering group has provided opportunities within these arenas to explore other ideas for improvement and development, "Foster Families United" and Level 3/4 panels for carer progression are just two examples. The project has certainly elicited energy and excitement and given such positive progress during the year culminating in a net gain of 21 carers the thought continues that there is a real opportunity to continue to increase our cohort of mainstream and connected carers within a Fostering Service that is fully open to challenge and change. It is only by exploring and embracing these opportunities that we will truly as a service achieve our potential with our overall aim to improve the outcomes for the children and young people in our care.

4.0 Key Achievements 2018-2019

- 4.1 A Net Gain of 21 foster carers has been achieved considering both mainstream and connected carers and that some have transferred to Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) during the year. Success in all areas has impacted on the overall net gain of carers.
- 4.2 20 SGO orders have been achieved.
- 4.3 Continued increased enquiries supported through sophisticated media campaigns and digital advertising.
- 4.4 A designated Fostering website continues to share pertinent information and is regularly updated.

- 4.5 Governance for the Family Values project well established, a steering group and work streams meet monthly to monitor progress of the project.
- 4.6 The "Truth be Told" film promoting Fostering has been released in collaboration with the West Midlands consortium.
- 4.7 The Foster Carer newsletter is published monthly and includes a section "Fostering story of the month" Good news stories are routinely sought from Foster carers and Social Workers.
- 4.8 An Easter Egg hunt was held at Bantock Park with Halloween, and Christmas parties held at Bert Williams Centre, all were well attended and enjoyed by Foster Carers and Children and Young People.
- 4.9 Increased participation by Foster carers in Advertising campaigns and in the Family Values workstreams.
- 4.10 A policy outlining Escalation to Level 3 - 4 for Foster carers has been shared and panels set up quarterly to consider applications from carers who apply to be Level 3 or 4 carers.
- 4.11 The complete Foster Carers register highlighting vacancies and the status of all placements has been shared with the Placement Team, Emergency Team and managers working out of hours in order that ALL can make Internal Placements as appropriate.
- 4.12 All Foster Carers currently on the "Dormant" list are regularly contacted and whilst unable to offer a full-time placement have facilitated respite to support other Foster Carers requiring a break.
- 4.13 The Training Programme for Foster Carers 2019-2020 has been revised, new courses and developmental days added to the calendar offering an increased variety of subjects and with built in Forums to maximise carers potential to attend both.
- 4.14 Customer Service Officers trained in aspects of Fostering in order that they handle enquiries effectively and sharing pertinent information to Fostering to support applications. The Fostering newsletter is shared with Customer Service Officers to further enhance their awareness of the service.
- 4.15 Enquiries are tracked effectively to pin-point origins of referrals to better inform campaigns going forward.
- 4.16 The use of Twitter has increased to maximise the Fostering Service capacity to reach a wider audience using Social Media.
- 4.17 Therapeutic Reflective sessions running twice monthly for Fostering Social Workers and facilitated by a CAMHS Social Worker to compliment the model of training (18 week-Nurturing Attachments Training Programme) to Foster Carers.

- 4.18 The Personal Development Plan for Foster Carers to support their development and future training needs filed as a separate document to compliment Supervision.
- 4.19 Free Swimming lessons for Children and Young People in Care agreed by City of Wolverhampton Council.
- 4.20 Improved interface between the Fostering service and Housing which will improve opportunities for the service to support current carers and prospective carers in applying for House moves/bigger properties.
- 4.21 Fostering Social Worker trainer trained in Restorative practice will deliver Restorative training to the Fostering Panel Members.
- 4.22 Therapeutic Parenting Training courses will be offered three times yearly to foster carers.
- 4.23 All newly approved foster carers are allocated a “buddy” and receive weekly visits from their Supervising Social Worker.
- 4.24 The new model of fostering “Foster Families United” has been developed and a pilot hub of carers reflecting the model with encouraging progress and outcomes thus far.
- 4.25 Private Fostering Forums have been set up quarterly and attended by Private Fostering Champions from partner agencies.
- 4.26 A visit to North Yorkshire Local Authority provided opportunities to observe progress of a Fostering Service within a different demographic.
- 4.27 A pop-up shop has been secured in the Mander Centre with Wolverhampton having access at agreed times throughout the year to promote Fostering and use as part of Fostering Fortnight. The shop has been well utilised and has secured referrals to further progress.
- 4.28 A Foster Home Review Improvement Plan has been implemented which has secured improvements in the completion of basic requirements in respect of carers i.e. unannounced visits, delegated authority and safer care statements.

5.0 Key Objectives 2019-2020

- 5.1 To achieve the target of a net gain of 28 Mainstream Foster carers to provide for the diverse range of children’s needs.
- 5.2 To complete connected assessments in timescales as directed and achieve a net gain of connected foster carers whilst acknowledging that successful conversion to SGOs will impact on overall gains.
- 5.3 To achieve 30 Special Guardianship Orders.
- 5.4 To fully launch the Foster Carer Portal to enable access by all carers to the offered training opportunities, Information, Policy and Procedures and developmental information.

- 5.5 To further develop existing and new carers to provide for children's needs, promote understanding, resilience of carers and placement stability by reviewing policies to include short breaks/respite, buddy system and additional benefits available to foster carers.
- 5.6 To continue to review recruitment materials and processes and continue to implement the recommendations from the Family Values Project undertaken by iMPower whilst being open minded to all ideas and development opportunities that will enhance and improve the Fostering Service which include visiting other authorities particularly those who have recruited high numbers of foster carers and achieved significantly improved outcomes.
- 5.7 The focus on Private Fostering needs to continue to be strengthened and the profile promoted to increase awareness and understanding of this often-misunderstood area of care. Further training opportunities to be offered across Children's Social Care, with partner agencies and the voluntary sector and to ensure the quarterly is well attended by champions from partner agencies and all relevant materials shared.
- 5.8 The pilot linked to "Foster Families United" project commenced on 1 May 2019 and consists of an experienced foster carer acting as a hub carer with three fostering families linked. All carers will be supervised by the same supervising social worker who has recently been appointed to the project whilst a CAMHS practitioner will provide clinical supervision to all within the pilot. The hub carer has planned activities for the carers and is providing additional support in line with the model. Progress regarding this pilot will be shared with senior managers in August 2019. Media campaigns have begun in respect of this project and it will feature in both mainstream and targeted events throughout the year.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The annual approved budget for the Fostering Service for 2018-2019 is £5.6 million.
- 6.2 The costs associated with the Foster Families United project are contained within the existing budget for the Fostering Service.
- 6.3 As more foster carers are recruited and approved in-house costs will increase but cost reductions will be seen against other placement budgets such as residential and private fostering arrangements.
- 6.4 The average weekly cost of an in-house foster placement is £382, this is a saving of £3,378 when compared to the average weekly cost of a residential placement and £404 when compared to the average weekly cost of a private fostering arrangement.
[NM/08072019/I]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 The legal relevant legislation and guidance is contained within the body of the report. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
[TC/12072019/T]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 The Fostering Service works with foster carers and colleagues from a diverse background to meet the needs of children and young people from a diverse background in respect of ethnicity, culture, age and disability.

9.0 Environmental implications

- 9.1 The Fostering service has a high profile and accesses organisations across the city to promote and develop opportunities to recruit new foster carers and hold events for both carers and children and young people.

10.0 Human resources implications

- 10.1 There are no Human resources implications.

11.0 Corporate Landlord implications

- 11.1 The Fostering Service works with the Housing Organisations to ensure any foster carers access any local authority housing appropriately particularly with regard to requests for larger properties.

12.0 Health and Wellbeing implications

- 12.1 The Health and wellbeing of Wolverhampton Foster carers is considered through regular supervision and any issues are addressed by supervising social workers in conjunction with children's social workers as appropriate. Complaints are addressed within corporate timescales.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

- 13.1 The full Annual Fostering Report 2018-2019 had been attached as an appendix and contains full details of the service with set objectives 2019-2020.